

Our African Adventure

By LTC Steve Wertz



SSG Eduardo Alegria of B Battery, 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment, discusses procedures with Ethiopian soldiers and civilians during a medical capabilities operation in Ethiopia. (Photo courtesy of LTC Steve Wertz, U.S. Army)

ALTHOUGH AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ ARE AT THE EPICENTER OF AMERICA'S WAR ON TERROR, TERRORIST GROUPS THREATEN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD AS WELL. ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS IS THE GREATER HORN OF AFRICA REGION - DJIBOUTI, ERITREA, ETHIOPIA, KENYA, SOMALIA AND THE SUDAN, ALONG WITH YEMEN, THEIR VOLATILE NEIGHBOR. AL QAEDA HAS ALREADY STRUCK IN THE REGION, AND THE AREA'S COMPLEX HISTORY, SHARED POVERTY, POOR GOVERNANCE, UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND RENOWNED RESISTANCE AGAINST WESTERN COLONIZERS HAVE CREATED AN INTRICATE WEB OF OPPORTUNITY FOR POTENTIAL TERRORISTS."

BATTLING TERRORISM IN THE HORN OF AFRICA,

EDITED BY ROBERT I. ROTBERG

While many of our comrades from around the military continue to fight terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment spent the past 15 months fighting the same fight in a little-discussed area of the world that is ripe for the spread of extremism. The Horn of Africa is comprised of multiple countries, ethnicities, religious beliefs, government forms and cultures. Due to the relative instability of many countries in the Horn of Africa, it has been a target for extremist groups in recent years.

Indirect approach. The war on terrorism in the Horn of Africa is being waged much differently than in Iraq and Afghanistan. The majority of the U.S. government's efforts in the Horn of Africa are being fought, not with bullets, but with ideas. Influence is critical. A common motto at Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa is "Helping Africans solve African challenges."

The United States learned from its difficulties in Somalia in 1993 that direct military intervention is not always the best way to execute operations in this part of the world. In 2002, Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa was established under U.S. Central Command in the small country of Djibouti, just off of the Gulf of Aden, as a mostly U.S. Marine Corps-led joint headquarters. Since its infancy, Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa has evolved into a full-fledged joint task force with multiple lines of operation. The task force provides mentorship to multiple militaries in the region in both ground and maritime operations; provides medical, dental and veterinary support for the population; and builds schools, dairies, livestock slaughterhouses, bridges, roads, wells and other necessities in this poverty-stricken region. In October 2008, the task force was assigned to U.S. Africa Command.

2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment deployed to Africa in March and May 2008. The battalion deployed under two infantry company requests for forces. Initially, the battalion and U.S. Central Command requested that the requests for forces be consolidated and that the entire battalion deploy. However, this request was denied. Despite not officially being on a request for forces, the battalion deployed its command element and a small staff to execute tactical command and control of the unit. The rest of the battalion task organized from its Multiple-Launch Rocket System battalion structure into two infantry companies that deployed in accordance with its latest arrival dates. Deploying the command and staff elements proved

to be one of the most valuable decisions the battalion made. The Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa staff is a mostly U.S. Navy-led joint staff that produces primarily operational-level staff work. The battalion staff's presence allowed us to take operational guidance from the joint staff and turn it into tactical tasks for our batteries. Deploying the staff also allowed us to oversee the logistical needs of our Soldiers in Djibouti and throughout East Africa.

2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment was the largest maneuver unit in Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa and the largest U.S. military formation inside Africa. Our primary responsibilities were foreign military training, force protection for civil-military projects and joint combat search and rescue throughout the area of responsibility. During the last five months of our deployment, we also executed security operations for Camp Lemonier, Djibouti.

Foreign military training. Perhaps the most exciting and challenging mission the battalion executed during our deployment was training and mentoring foreign militaries. We executed this task in a myriad of ways in multiple countries. The following paragraphs describe some of our larger foreign military training efforts.

Ugandan NCO Academy. The battalion provided NCOs to mentor instructors and students in the Ugandan Junior and Senior NCO Academies in Jinja, Uganda. One of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa's primary operational objectives is NCO professionalization within its area of responsibility. Most of the African countries that we worked alongside have very officer-centric armies. When soldiers show potential for leadership, they are made officers. However after observing the U.S. Army, many countries have begun to show a desire to professionalize their NCO corps. Uganda is one of the primary countries where these efforts are taking fruit.

Our NCOs in Jinja actually taught about 25 percent of the courses in the two academies and mentored Ugandan instructors during their remaining instruction. Although our expertise was requested and desired, it was important that these courses had a Ugandan face on them.

Following the first iteration of the Junior and Senior NCO Academies, our instructor team developed an instructor qualification course for the Ugandan instructors. During this course, our team introduced new instructional subjects and mentored the Ugandans on their instructional techniques. This ad-hoc course will likely have the most

lasting impact of all our efforts in Uganda. Improving Ugandan instruction through Ugandan instructors is truly paving the way for the future of the Ugandan NCO corps.

Ugandan Counter Terrorism Course. Along the shores of Lake Victoria, our battalion provided an instructional team for what the Ugandans called their Counter Terrorism Course. In reality, this 16-week course, located in Kasenyi, Uganda, was a very basic infantry course made up of soldiers from throughout the Ugandan People's Defense Force. 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment NCOs were the primary instructors for this entire course. They were responsible for the Ugandan soldiers from sun-up until the duty day was complete. Our instructional team taught these young Ugandans basic marksmanship, physical fitness, basic soldier skills and some basic and advanced infantry tactics, techniques and procedures.

Kenyan Warrior Leaders Course. In the beautiful Mount Kenya region, our Soldiers developed and executed what we called the "Kenyan Warrior Leaders Course" for the Kenyan army's 20th Parachute Regiment. Our Soldiers got the full wilderness experience by living among monkeys, antelope and other wildlife in the bush along with their Kenyan counterparts.

Ethiopian NCO Academy. 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment NCOs developed and taught an instructional qualification course to the cadre at the Ethiopian NCO Academy in Tolay, Ethiopia. This venture was one of Combined Joint

Task Force-Horn of Africa's most high profile missions because it was the first U.S. military venture with the Ethiopian military in many years. Our NCOs deployed to this remote area of Ethiopia on short notice, believing they would simply be advisors to the Ethiopian instructors. A week after their arrival, they were teaching the Ethiopian cadre eight hours a day, five days a week. Not only did our instructional team develop a program of instruction for the instructor course while simultaneously teaching, they also developed programs of instruction for the newly created Master Sergeant and Sergeant Major's Course. After one iteration of the instructor course, our instructors switched gears and began instructing the Sergeant Major Cadre Course.

Liberia. Although not in the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa area of responsibility, the battalion also contributed an instructor team to the U.S. Africa Command's foreign military training mission in Liberia. Following a lengthy internal conflict, this war-torn nation has begun rebuilding. In the past two years, Liberia's military has started over from the ground floor. 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment instructors mentored infantry battalion leadership at the battalion, company and platoon levels, and provided medical subject matter expertise and training in these rebuilding efforts.

East Africa Stand-by Brigade. The U.S. government provides training assistance to various African countries through a program called Africa Contingency Operations



SSG Christopher Crocker and SSG Steven Teets of C Battery, 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment, instruct students from the Ugandan People's Defense Force on squad-level infantry tactics at the Ugandan Counter Terrorism Course in Kasenyi, Uganda. (Photo courtesy of LTC Steve Wertz, U.S. Army)

and Training Assistance. The U.S. State Department led program, which couples military contractors and active-duty military members, provides training and assistance to African militaries. This training usually occurs before African nations send forces to execute stability operations in locations such as Sudan and Somalia.

In the past few years, the African Union has developed five regional security forces to be deployed regionally should conflict arise. The East Africa Stand-by Brigade was in the conceptual phase when 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment deployed, but throughout our deployment the battalion's contributions enabled this concept to become a reality. The East Africa Stand-by Brigade staff consists of officers and NCOs from the 13 member nations. Should situations arise that require the deployment of this force, member nations from within the East Africa Stand-by Brigade will contribute tactical forces to the mission.

In assisting with this mission, we contributed one of our majors to work full-time with the British Peace Security Team in Karen, Kenya. This officer, initially MAJ Todd Mefford and later MAJ Mark Simpson, worked as a planner in developing several training and certification exercises for the East Africa Stand-by Brigade staff. We also contributed command, operations and logistics officers and NCOs to mentor the East Africa Stand-by Brigade staff during several Africa Contingency Operations and Training Assistance Program training exercises and, ultimately, the staff's certification.

This was an incredibly rewarding venture for both the African soldiers and 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment personnel. As you can imagine, taking officers from multiple countries with different military philosophies and doctrines and forming a trained, cohesive staff can be difficult. Although many challenges lie ahead for the East Africa Stand-by Brigade, we feel very satisfied the work done over the past 15 months has allowed East Africa to make huge strides in its security.

Other Africa Contingency Operations and Training Assistance Program missions. Besides working with the East Africa Stand-by Brigade, we also contributed instructor teams to other Africa Contingency Operations and Training Assistance Program training missions in Ethiopia and Rwanda. These instructors

worked with battalion Soldiers and their staffs to prepare for regional deployments to Darfur and southern Sudan.

Force protection. A second major mission the battalion executed during its deployment was force protection for various operations throughout the area of responsibility. Due to the lack of resources in most areas within the Horn of Africa, the U.S. government, through the military, is executing numerous civil-military projects. 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment Soldiers provided security for civil affairs teams, Army well-drillers and Navy Seabees who are executing these projects, which include the construction of schools, livestock slaughterhouses, wells, bridges and many other facilities. Medical, dental and veterinary assistance was also provided to the people of this region through Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa. Besides executing force protection for each of these operations, we also provided medics for multiple medical capabilities operations and Soldiers simply to hold animals during veterinary capabilities operations.

The battalion's two most prominent enduring force protection missions were located in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, and Manda Bay, Kenya. In Dire Dawa, the battalion deployed a sizable force protection team to assist multiple civil affairs and Navy Seabee missions in eastern Ethiopia. In Manda Bay, *Mission Ready* Soldiers provided camp security for a small U.S. contingency operating location on the northeast coast of Kenya. Our Soldiers at Manda Bay also provided force protection for Army civil affairs teams operating in the region. Although these two missions endured for our entire deployment, the battalion also executed force protection for other missions in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania.

Joint combat search and rescue. *Mission Ready* Soldiers executed the important mission of fixed-wing and rotary wing security for Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa's joint combat search and rescue operations. Working closely with Air Force parajumpers assigned to the command, a platoon of *Mission Ready* Soldiers executed this mission for the entirety of our deployment. This challenging mission was great for our Soldiers; they constantly trained in advanced infantry tactics and executed numerous training and real-world missions.

Camp security. Although camp security was not initially one of our assigned missions, circumstances required that the battalion execute this important task during the final five months of our deployment. Marines have executed security operations for Camp Lemonnier and the U.S. Embassy in Djibouti since its origination in 2002. However, due to global commitments elsewhere, the U.S. Marine Corps ceased executing this mission in April 2009. No replacements were provided to perform this task. Although the threat to our operating location in Djibouti was quite different from the threat in Iraq or Afghanistan, the camp is located six miles from the border of Somalia. Thus, security remains a very important task. Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa asked our battalion to execute this mission until the force assigned to this task arrived in August. However, the command also required that we continue most of our missions in East Africa as well as our joint combat search and rescue mission. Executing this mission with the forces and equipment on hand required detailed staff work, creative manning solutions and a shift in training focus. We completely reorganized our forces, redeployed and moved Soldiers all over the area of responsibility and re-trained our Soldiers on new tasks. Ultimately, we were able to successfully execute this task as well as continue our work throughout the area of responsibility.

Important lessons learned. During the 2009 Year of the NCO, nowhere were the contributions of U.S. Army NCOs more apparent than in our operations in Africa. To call 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment's operations decentralized is an understatement. While our battalion's command and staff played a very important role in developing force structure and materials and providing logistical support for our teams in East Africa, as well as filling a huge tactical command and control void for Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, we did not direct the daily operations of our deployed forces. This task was left to the junior officers and NCOs that led our teams. For the majority of our missions, sergeants first class, staff sergeants, or even sergeants were in charge. We only deployed officers to areas where their presence was needed to liaise with their African counterparts. Even in those locations, officers primarily executed coordination; NCOs executed

"This was an incredibly rewarding venture for both the African soldiers and 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment personnel."

"Influence and ideas are what will ultimately win the battle against extremism in the Horn of Africa."

the majority of the training and leadership tasks.

To get a realistic picture of the degree of autonomy our deployed Soldiers operated under, you must understand the geographic separation that existed between our teams and their battery and battalion headquarters. Our teams executed operations literally thousands of miles from their parent organizations. Personal responsibility and extreme competence were required to succeed. Our Soldiers performed brilliantly in this environment. They coordinated and directed operations with senior officer and NCO leaders from multiple nations, built programs of instruction and taught courses with little guidance or assistance, provided force protection for strategic level projects and performed many other tasks with no actual oversight. When given the opportunity to lead in this environment, our young leaders rose to the occasion. They did all this while maintaining the highest standard of personal conduct and endearing themselves to the Africans they worked and lived with. The success of our battalion and Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa during our deployment is directly attributable to our NCO and small unit leaders.

African pride. Our entire unit was very impressed by the competence of the African militaries we worked with. Africans are highly intelligent and, in many cases, well-schooled. Countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda are steeped in Western military doctrine based on their colonial past. These countries educate many of their officers in the United States, Great Britain and France – among other places. Most of the officers and veteran soldiers we encountered have multiple operational deployments, executing stability operations in Darfur, southern Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia. Thus, when we discussed and trained for stability operations in Africa, it was important that we understood that our African counterparts actually knew more than we did. The major difference between them and us is resources. Training and operational budgets are very limited, and their equipment is old or non-existent. However, this does not stop them from beating the bush for hours each day, marching miles without water, while they hunt down rebel factions who threaten the local population. The truth is that most of the African nations we worked with are good at what they do and take immense pride in the quality of their work. Embracing this

fact was critical in allowing our Soldiers to effectively mentor and work with them.

Culture. In order for our Soldiers to succeed, it was imperative that they become fully immersed in both the military and social cultures of the countries where they operated. It was vital that they establish credibility as professionals who truly cared about the people they mentored and the civilian population they interacted with. Our Soldiers lived in a variety of conditions. They ranged from a two-story house in the middle of Jinja, Uganda, where a housekeeper cooked for the team, to a building at the Ethiopian NCO Academy, that was condemned by U.S. standards, where our Soldiers survived for months on meals ready to eat, Ethiopian food and Spam sandwiches.

Regardless of the living conditions, one of the keys to our success was embracing the culture. Our Soldiers in Uganda interacted daily with the local population, attended church, festivals and other local activities. Our Soldiers in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, played weekend basketball games with locals and dined in local eating establishments. Our troops in Tolay, Ethiopia, played daily volleyball games with the students and cadre at the NCO academy. Our Soldiers did many other things to immerse themselves in the local culture, which was yet another key to our success.

Go the extra mile. People from all over the world can tell whether you truly care about them or not. Early on in our deployment, one of our battery commanders organized a group of Soldiers who began spending time with local orphans in Djibouti. Weekly, our Soldiers gave their time, energy and, ultimately, their resources to help these people who have absolutely nothing. To say that the people of Djibouti and the other countries where we worked live in poverty is an understatement. Most people live in homemade huts without electricity, running water or any of the other luxuries that we take for granted. To see this and live among it is truly eye-opening. However, our Soldiers did something about it. They inconvenienced themselves enough to show the population they cared. The efforts in Djibouti grew throughout our time in theater to the degree that service members from throughout Camp Lemonnier began participating and American individuals and organizations began sending items for these needy people.

In Jinja, Uganda, our NCO-in-charge organized his crew and spent over 1,000

man hours working with a local orphanage school. They built and planted an orchard that will someday feed over 80,000 people in this area of the world where food is a scarce resource and people go hungry. What's more, they gave of themselves to truly get to know the people and children who lived and worked there. This group and others worked with local schools, churches and other organizations to invest in the lives of the communities where they worked. They did not do this at the direction of their chain of command or to earn public accolades; they did it because they are good people who care.

The truth is that our Soldiers are the only Americans most of these Africans have ever met or will ever meet. I am confident that we had a very positive influence on the Africans we instructed and worked alongside – both professionally and personally. We performed our assigned tasks in a professional, competent manner and had operational impact for Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa and U.S. Africa Command. However, I believe the impact our Soldiers had on the local populations – most of whom had never met any Americans – through their acts of compassion and generosity had an even greater impact in this area of the world for our country.

Influence and ideas are what will ultimately win the battle against extremism in the Horn of Africa. To this end, 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment contributed mightily. God knows, it was quite the experience. Our African adventure has changed our perspective and is an experience most of us will value forever.

Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Wertz, field artillery, is the commander of 2nd Battalion, 18th Field Artillery Regiment (MLRS) at Fort Sill, Okla. His previous assignments include operations officer for the 3rd Battlefield Coordination Detachment, Osan Airbase, Republic of Korea; brigade operations officer for 212th Field Artillery Brigade and battalion operations officer for 6-32 Field Artillery, Fort Sill; fire support officer for Combined Support Coordination Team #3, Yongin, Republic of Korea; gunnery instructor and chief of the Fire Direction Branch, Cannon Division, Gunnery Department, Fort Sill; regimental fire support officer, squadron fire support officer and howitzer battery commander, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, Fort Carson, Colo. He is a veteran of Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.